

REDEDICATION CEREMONIES AT RESTORED FATHER PANDOSY MISSION

Among the major projects undertaken to commemorate the One Hundredth Anniversary of Service to God in British Columbia was the restoration of the Okanagan Mission at Kelowna, founded by Oblate pioneer Charles Pandosy, O.M.I.¹

Okanagan timepieces were momentarily turned back 100 years in ceremonies and addresses marking the official rededication of the first permanent white settlement in the valley, the Immaculate Conception Mission. Okanagan has officially taken its place of honor among the several museum pieces in British Colombia.

How the forgotten and neglected mission property was recovered by the Oblates and how the relics of Father Pandosy's tireless efforts were almost lost forever is a story in itself. The repurchase was made only two weeks before the mission's three delapidated buildings were due to be burned as useless. The Congregation owes its thanks to....

SEVEN MEN AND A MISSION

In the late spring of 1954, Norman Carter, 39-year-old salesman for the Eaton Company of Canada, Ltd., set out from Vancouver on what was scheduled to be

¹ Born at Marseilles, Nov. 21, 1824; studied at the college of Bourbon d'Arles and the juniorate of N.D. de Lumieres; entered novitiate of N.D. de l'Osier on Aug. 14, 1844; pronounced perpetual vows before the Founder on Aug. 15, 1847; first obedience to the Oregon missions in 1847; priest at Walla-Walla from Jan. 2, 1848; died at Penticton on Feb. 9, 1891.

a perfectly routine trip to the Okanagan Valley, centre of B.C.'s thriving fruit industry.

Only recently has he, or any of the six other men involved in the curious sequence of events, learned the full implications of some quiet, off-duty « selling » he did on that trip.

And not until they read this will other British Columbians realise that it was only through the mere whim of a non-Catholic travelling salesman four years ago that the Catholic Church in B.C. was able to sponsor one of the major attractions in the province's starstudded 1958 Centennial Year celebrations.

If Carter had been a run-of-the-mill salesman, the whole thing might never have happened. But he's not. His talents are such that he could make his living equally well as a writer, a poet or a painter.

Ever since he was old enough to drive a car, Norman Carter has been travelling around B.C. Avidly interested in matters historical, agricultural, educational and otherwise cultural, he has seldom wasted a journey.

In his younger days he had a unique idea for breaking the monotony of the long drives throughout the province. In spring he'd pack his pockets full of seeds -- sunflowers, stocks, nasturtiums, cornflowers -- and every ten miles on the outgoing journey from Vancouver he'd stop the car and plant a few seeds by the roadside.

On the way home he'd do the same thing, only starting the 10-mile stops at the fifth mile so that his seedlings would grow up at alternate five-mile intervals. On ensuing journeys he would pull up at the same places to see how his flowers were coming along.

« It was a wonderful way to make me stop every so often to get a smell of the good earth and a look at some of the beautiful countryside I was speeding through », he says. « But as a horticulturalist I'm

afraid I was spectacularly unsuccessful. The seeds seldom came up ».

This being the nature of the man, it is not surprising that he was asked to write a spare-time travel column for WESTERN HOMES AND LIVING, B.C.'s top home-makers's magazine.

This he did for four years; one of them being 1954. And it was one Sunday afternoon in the spring of that year in Kelowna, hub city of the Okanagan Valley, that Norman Carter, researching for his travel column, located the original site of the earliest settlement in the Okanagan Valley.

The fact that such an important historic site had been « lost » until then was nothing unusual. Right up until the time their centennial year was suddenly upon them, British Columbians, by and large, couldn't have cared less about the history of their province. They had always been far too busy making history to record it. And aside from a few old-timers in the valley, even native-born British Columbians like Carter knew little or nothing about the establishment of the first settlement in the Okanagan.

They didn't know that it was a 33-year-old French missionary priest who was responsible for bringing the word of God, the first settlers, a thriving industry and a lasting culture to the Okanagan Valley.

They didn't know that this priest had as many talents as he had names, being in turn priest, musician, doctor, architect, singer, linguist, lawyer and sports coach.

He was Father Charles John Felix Adolph Marie Pandosy, O.M.I., one of the intrepid Oblates of Mary Immaculate, pioneer missionary priests of B.C., who probably did more than any other single group towards the evangelisation and civilisation of the natives and early settlers.

Heading up a small party of would-be settlers,

mostly French Canadians, Father Pandosy came into B.C. from Colville, south of the U.S. border. After walking north for ten days through rugged mountain wilderness, the party reached the shores of Lake Okanagan on October 8, 1859.

Deciding to establish his mission there, Father Pandosy built a temporary shelter and prepared to settle down for the night.

As dusk fell, the local natives announced their presence, appearing out of the bush in all their war paint, circling the frail shelter in typical Indian-war-whoop fashion.

Fearful for the lives of his party, Father Pandosy took a long-bladed knife from his kit and walked from the shelter to a nearby tree. Cutting a small circle in the bark, he stepped back several paces and flung the knife at the tiny target.

He did this several times, each time scoring a bull's-eye.

The natives came to a sudden halt and watched, amazed, then afraid.

After the third bull's-eye they crept away. They could see they had met their match in this tall, long-bearded, « Black robe ». And thenceforth Father Pandosy commanded their complete respect.

For 30 years or more Father Pandosy gave selfless, devoted attention to the spiritual, cultural and economic needs of his ever-growing flock.

Realising the possibilities presented by the rich, fertile soil of the Okanagan Valley, he brought in some seedling fruit trees, successfully cultivating them in the mission grounds.

He encouraged the Indians and settlers to do the same, teaching them how to nurture, grow and graft the fruit trees, until the valley was ablaze with flourishing orchards.

An outstanding musician, he added singing and

music to the three R's at the mission school and soon formed the first children's brass band in the province.

Like his fellow missionaries pioneering in other parts of the province, Father Pandosy lived in abject poverty, suffering indescribable privations and hardships. Most of these early Oblates died, not of old age, but of consumption, pneumonia or intestinal cancer.

On February 6, 1891, returning from a mission some 50 miles away, Father Pandosy got as far as the Indian reserve at Penticton where he collapsed from exposure and exhaustion. Suffering from pneumonia he was taken into the house of his old friend, Indian Chief Francois, in whose arms he died a few hours later.

Before the turn of the century, the Oblates were withdrawn from Kelowna to work in other missions throughout B.C.

The old mission property was sold and, as the years passed, the newcomers to the Okanagan valley were far too busy developing their billion-dollar fruit industry and their civilisation to dwell at any length upon the fate of the devout missionary priest who had turned the first sod.

Though Father Pandosy's body was brought back to Kelowna and buried in the mission grounds, his grave was unmarked and his remains have never been located.

Suffice to note that, in all his trips through the Okanagan Valley, Norman Carter had yet to meet anyone who remembered exactly where the old mission property was, let alone Father Pandosy's grave.

On this particular weekend, however, with a free Sunday looming up, he decided to do a little research. A column on Father Pandosy's mission would undoubtedly attract high readership in WESTERN HOMES AND LIVING.

Following a business call at the Kelowna School

District offices one Saturday, Carter began talking about the Okanagan Mission to Rosemary King, accountant for the School Board.

As luck would have it, Rosemary was fairly well versed on the subject, having studied quite a bit of Okanagan history in connection with her work. She thought she knew where the mission was — about three miles out of town.

Scouring the district by car that Sunday afternoon, they eventually came upon Father Pandosy's old mission — three broken-down, moss-covered, farm buildings being used as cattle stalls, hen house and pig sties. A hundred feet or so in front of the buildings were two incredibly old apple trees, grotesquely gnarled and dying for want of pruning.

The main timbers of the buildings were massive, hand-hewn logs and still in fairly good shape. But the hand-shake roofs, the tiny wooden balcony from which Father Pandosy preached to the Indians, the Oblate crest, and other unique features which identified the buildings as the original church, school and house, were rapidly disintegrating into complete ruin.

Delighted with his find, Carter shot off a whole roll of film, and continued on his selling trip through the Okanagan Valley.

Back in Vancouver, he wrote one of his best-ever columns on his Okanagan trip, giving Father Pandosy's mission generous coverage, plus a picture.

Again, the whole thing might have ended here had Carter not pursued the whim which prompted him to track down the old mission buildings in the first place.

Time and again, through his travel column, he had deplored the fact that many of B.C.'s most historic sites were falling into rack and ruin, oblivion even, and no-one seemed to care.

Following his find of Father Pandosy's mission, he was more than ever convinced that something should be done about it. But what?

He worried about it on and off for several weeks until eventually a germ of an idea came to him.

Of all the information he had gleaned in Kelowna for his column on the Okanagan Mission, the fact which had imbedded itself most deeply in his mind was that the doughty missionary priest was a member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a religious order with which Carter, though a non-Catholic, was well acquainted.

As contract salesman for Eaton's, he supplied equipment for most of the Government Indian Residential Schools in B.C. Through many years of business association with them, he had come to know and admire the Oblate Fathers who operated most of the schools, counting many of them among his personal friends.

The Oblates were the answer, Carter decided. Once they heard about it he was sure they would see, as he did, the possibilities of that old mission property and its historic importance not only to the Church but to the whole of B.C.

Having thought things through this far, it wasn't difficult for Carter to decide which of his Oblate friends to talk to. It could only be Father Fergus O'Grady, Provincial of the English-speaking Oblates in Ottawa, formerly principal of Kamloops Indian Residential School (now Bishop of the Vicariate of Prince Rupert, B.C.).

Putting a clipping of his column in an envelope, attaching a note saying he'd like to talk to him about it sometime. Carter mailed it off to Father O'Grady in Ottawa.

The reply came by return, and in person.

Flying from Ottawa to Vancouver, Father Provincial drove straight from the airport to Eatons. And into Carter's fifth-floor office a few moments later walked the second of the seven men who were to be respon-

sible for the eventual restoration of the Okanagan Mission.

As soon as he heard Carter's story, Father O'Grady decided to go up to Kelowna right away to see the place for himself. Carter didn't know how large a piece of property it was, or who owned it, let alone whether it could be bought. But he gave his friend all the pictures he'd taken and wished him well.

Before Father Provincial left for Kelowna he put in a long-distance call to the third man, Lawrence Guichon, a Quilchena rancher and member of the well-known pioneer Catholic family.

Chaufering his old friend Father O'Grady from airports to missions was nothing new to Lawrence Guichon. He and his father before him had spent of their lives giving service to their province and their church, particularly to the Oblate missionaries.

But well as he knew that part of the province, even Lawrence Guichon didn't know where Father Pandosy's mission was.

« We'll go see Shorty Collett » he told Father O'Grady as they sped towards Kelowna. « He'll know where it is for sure ».

H.C.S. Collett, another pioneer land owner and cattle man, a non-Catholic, was a lifelong friend of Lawrence Guichon, but he hadn't met Father O'Grady before.

He knew where the old mission buildings were because he was a very active member of the Kelowna Historical Society. And when he heard that Father O'Grady was interested in obtaining the property for the Oblates he was only too happy to help. That was what the Historical Society had been wanting to do for years, he said, but they hadn't the funds or support.

But « Shorty, fourth man in the chain, had bad news for them. The property had been re-sold only two weeks ago, to a Kelowna butcher.

Dismayed, but determined, Father O'Grady suggested they take a look at the mission, then talk to the owner afterwards.

Walking ankle-deep in farm-yard mire, shooing chickens from their roosts, Father O'Grady inspected the desolate buildings which had been carved out of the surrounding forests almost a hundred years before.

Heart-sick, he crossed the yard and stood for a moment gazing at the two old apple trees, their limbs crumbling at a touch, devoid of life-giving sap. And right there and then he came to a decision.

Two acres of that property, which would include all the buildings and orchard area, was all the Oblates would need to perpetuate the memory of their heroic pioneer.

Recalling the incident now, Bishop O'Grady says: « Naturally enough, the butcher was very reluctant to sell the property at first, having just bought it. But we explained how much it would mean to us and to the whole province. Then he told us we were lucky to come when we did because any day he was going to burn those old buildings down. He wanted to put his cattle in there to graze and he didn't know what the old shacks were, except they were useless to him ».

Eventually the new owner agreed to let the Oblates have two acres of his property, provided they surveyed and fenced it themselves, for \$ 1,200.

« « Being a missionary priest I didn't happen to have \$ 1,200 in my pocket » says the Bishop with a grin « but I was desperate. So I said we'd take it. An it wasn't till we got out of there that I began to worry about where on earth we'd get the money, and who'd look after the property for us if we did ».

«Shorty» Collet relieved him of one of these problems. He offered to arrange and supervise, without any payment, the surveying and fencing of the two

acres of property, acting in these and any additional negotiations as the Kelowna contact for Father O'Grady, who had to return to Ottawa the following day.

Back in Vancouver that night, Father O'Grady had a dinner engagement with the man who was to become the fifth in the 7-man sequence.

He was, and still is, one of Vancouver's leading lawyers, a Catholic, and a personal friend of long standing.

As soon as his lawyer friend heard where Father O'Grady had been that day, he wanted to know the whole story. Having heard it, he immediately pulled out his cheque book and wrote out a cheque for the \$ 1,200.

« The only condition attached to this is that I'm invited to be there for the unveiling of the memorial plaque » he quipped.

The Father Provincial promised he would, although at that time no thought had been given to the restoration of the mission which, again, would cost money.

Two years went by and then, in January 1956, Father O'Grady was consecrated Bishop of Prince Rupert, which event brought him back West again.

The first trip the new prelate made after taking up his new appointment was to the old Okanagan mission at Kelowna. Once again, Lawrence Guichon met him at Kamloops airport and drove him south to Kelowna where they met « Shorty » Collet.

During the intervening two years, « Shorty » had seen to everything, the Bishop recalls. He'd had the two acres surveyed, negotiated the sale, bought the wire for the fence, had the fence erected, and brought in bulldozers to clean up, sending all the bills to the Bishop in Ottawa.

With his consecration and transfer to Prince Ru-

pert, the Kelowna area no longer came under the Bishop's jurisdiction. The southern-most limit of his northern vicariate was at Quesnel. Oblate affairs in Kelowna were now under the supervision of the new Father Provincial, Very Rev. Lawrence K. Poupore, O.M.I., resident in Ottawa.

Re-visiting the fenced-in, cleaned-up, but still desolate site, the three men realised that unless something was done pretty soon, the old buildings would completely disintegrate. Lawrence Guichon figured they'd be lucky if they stood up to another couple of winters.

Pondering this, and subduing the thought that the project was really no longer his "baby", the Bishop was hit with a brilliant idea.

« We'll make it a centennial year project! » he declared.

In 1958 both B.C. and the Oblates were due to celebrate their 100th anniversary. What better time than this double-edged celebration to restore the Okanagan mission? Why, they could even have a nice memorial plaque, hand-carved by the little Indian children at Kamloops Residential School, they could have the school choirs, and outdoor Mass in the mission grounds.....

The more the Bishop thought about it, the more determined he became.

Accordingly, for twelve months or more, whenever he had occasion to go to Ottawa, the Bishop pressed the cause of B.C. s' Centennial Year and the restoration of the Pandosy mission.

It came as no surprise to anyone when in November, 1957, Fr. Poupore eventually made a trip West and visited the old mission site.

One look at the ruins of Father Pandosy's little church and the ignominities to which it had been

subjected was enough to start Father Provincial asking estimates for its restoration. But even the lowest was prohibitive.

Then into the picture walked the sixth man. He was Jack Bedford, Grand Knight of the Pandosy Chapter of the Knights of Columbus in Kelowna, a contractor by trade.

If the Oblates would pay for the materials, he and his Knights would do all the work, he assured the Provincial. Their membership included carpenters, builders, farmers and bull-dozer operators, and between them they should be able to « fix the place up a bit ». They could plow up the ground and seed crested wheat grass, jack up the buildings and put them on concrete foundations, take off the hand-made shakes and replace them again so there were no gaps showing. They could even prune those old apple trees and, when the memorial plaque arrived, build a special arch for it.

Delighted with their offer, the Provincial went back to Ottawa where the Provincial Administration, having heard the whole story, voted the sum of \$ 1500 to pay for the materials.

All that remained was to appoint a B.C. Oblate as supervisor for the restoration plans.

So it was that on Thursday, December 12, 1957, on the very brink of Centennial Year, the last man in the seven-man chain of events — Very Rev. James Mulvihill, Principal of Kamloops Indian Residential School and a member of the Oblate Provincial Council, drove south to Kelowna for a meeting with « Shorty » Collet and Jim Bedford at one of B.C.'s most historic spots.

June 15, 1958, was the day of the rededication ceremonies. In an outdoor ceremony, taking place on the mission site, the Very Rev. Joseph R. Birch, O.M.I., Asst. Gen., sang a Solemn High Mass in the

presence of some 1500 persons who had come to pay tribute to the almost forgotten Father Pandosy.

Preaching the sermon, His Exc., T.J. Mc Carthy, Bishop of Nelson, sounded the keynote when he said: « We pause to consider our heritage and the toil and labor of those who first brought Christianity to this valley 100 years ago ».

A 40-voice choir from the Indian school at Kamloops sang at the Mass.

During the civil ceremonies which took place in the afternoon, Dr. Willard Ireland, Provincial Archivist, representing Premier Bennett and the Provincial Government, expressed his hope that those responsible for the restoration of the mission site would endeavor still more, in giving due credit to the « founder of the Okanagan », to preserve the last remaining vestiges of the coming of the white man to the Okanagan Valley.

At the conclusion of the ceremonies, interested viewers went through the three remaining hand-hewed log structures at the mission. On view were a piece of original flooring, pitch pine blocks which formed the original foundation and a plastic bust of Father Pandosy.

Placed over the entrance to the chapel was an old holy picture of the Immaculate Conception which was found in one of the buildings.

Seven hundred square-headed nails, used by Father Pandosy to put shakes on the roof of one the buildings, were distributed to the crowd as souvenirs.